DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 530 EA 002 130

By-Trump, J. Lloyd; Hunt, Jane

Report on a National Survey of Secondary School Principals on the Nature and Extent of Student Activism.

Pub Date Mar 69

Note-7p.; Paper presented to the National Assn. of Secondary School Principals (San Francisco, Calif., March 1-5, 1969).

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.45

Descriptors-*Activism, Conduct, *High Schools, Hygiene, Instructional Programs, *Junior High Schools, *National Surveys, Political Issues, *Principals, Race Relations, Rural Schools, School Policy, Suburban Schools, Teaching Conditions, Urban Schools

Student activism is the subject of the hour. Three out of five principals surveyed report some form of active protest in their schools. Questionnaires sent to a random sample of 1,982 junior and senior high school principals throughout the U.S. show that 67% of city and suburban schools and 53% of rural schools are experiencing protests. Protest is almost as likely to occur in junior high as in high schools. The greatest percentage of complaints are against various school regulations, with dress and hair requirements heading the list. Only one-fourth of the schools, usually large- and medium-size senior high schools in suburban or big-city locations, have experienced activism in current political areas such as race relations, the peace movement, or the draft. The instructional program came up for criticism in 45% of the schools, about evenly distributed among junior and senior high schools in all parts of the nation. Teachers in 35% of all schools are actively protesting their working conditions and salary levels. Respondents from every type of community and kind of school felt that there was a growing need for new channels of communication among pupils, administrators, parents, and teachers. They believe that getting to know each other is the heart of the matter. (TT)

ED028220

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

REPORT ON A NATIONAL SURVEY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ON THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF STUDENT ACTIVISM*

by J. Lloyd Trump and Jane Hunt

"To be a principal in times like these is not for the faint-hearted -- and we're just getting started on this protest business."

The principal of a large urban high school is speaking. He echoes what principals are saying across the nation, in poverty-ridden cities or prosperous suburbs -- and even in rural communities where protest mainly is a word in a headline. Some believe:

> *The news media and 'bad' television programs such as the Smothers Brothers add to our problems. Sympathy directed to the radical minority makes it popular to join the group.*
>
> *Forces are afoot which will destroy education as it has been known here. At present there is no Phoenix standing by ready to rise from the ashes.*

But others say:

> *Accord respect to <u>responsible</u> protest -- they might just be right.*
>
> *The students, to our utter despair, are exhibiting -- at long last -- the very kinds of behavior that we say we want to encourage, nourish and develop as responsible educators. The requirement for (and agonies of) change are on our doorsteps more so than on theirs. We must change -- or foster total revolution in our schools -- public <u>or</u> private.*

The basic message is clear. Student activism is here. Three out of five principals report some form of active protest in their schools. Many who note no protest as yet add that they expect it in the near future.

What The Data Say

Sixty-seven percent of the city schools we surveyed are experiencing protests. For schools in the suburbs, the number with protests is also 67%. In rural areas, it drops to 53% -- still more than half of the respondents.

<u>Percentage of Schools Reporting Student Activism</u>

	Large (over 2,000)	Medium (801-2,000)	Small (801 or less)	All
Urban	74	62	60	67
Suburban	81	72	56	67
Rural	67	67	50	53

J. Lloyd Trump is Associate Secretary and Jane Hunt, an Editorial Associate, NASSP. Blondelle Hunter, Secretary, and Joseph Watterson, Assistant, helped to tabulate and prepare this report.

*Presented to National Association of Secondary School Principals, March 1-5, 1969, in San Francisco.

EA 002 130

One of the surprises of the survey was the fact that protest is almost as likely to occur in junior high schools as in senior high schools. Among the junior high schools, 56% report protest activities, as compared to 59% of all senior high schools so reporting.

Percentages of Junior and Senior High Schools with Student Activism

	Junior High	Senior High
Urban	59	63
Suburban	61	69
Rural	48	53
All	56	59

The Principals' Beliefs

The principals in our survey tell much the same story, regardless of where they live. But their tones of voice are diverse as the previous quotations illustrate. The differences reflect variations in local situations. They also reveal profound differences in the principals themselves. The second and the last statements quoted were made by close neighbors in a major city; yet one was in despair and the other almost elated. The variety and complexity of the principals' responses show that most are giving serious, open-minded thought to this complex problem.

Student activism is the subject of the hour. Newspaper editorials, columnists, legislators -- everyone has an opinion on it, whether he knows the situation firsthand or not. No wonder the principals have so much to say. Often an administrator whose students were not protesting offered as many constructive suggestions for handling situations as the principal whose students were actively objecting to something. Perhaps some principals had no activism because they had anticipated it and dealt with it before it became a problem.

How the Percentages Were Obtained

We used percentages based on a comparison of the number of schools reporting each kind of protest with the total number of schools that reported any protest. For example, if we say that 50% of the schools have protests on a certain topic, we mean 50% of all the respondents who reported any kind of protest. In other words, we are not counting the considerable number of schools, as indicated on page 1, that reported no student protests. Further discussion of how the survey was conducted appears at the end of the report.

Protests on School Regulations

Young people are becoming vocal on every topic from glue-sniffing to getting the vote for 18-year-olds. Except for a few issues, it is hard to discern a pattern in the unrest because so many subjects were mentioned. Many principals simply gave "society in general" or "the system" as the real target.

Dress and hair requirements head the list of complaints. One-third of all schools report objections to the dress code. One-quarter have protests on the subject of hair. Whether the community is rural, suburban or urban makes little difference. Protests are slightly more widespread in rural and suburban localities. Perhaps this merely indicates that city administrators are more tolerant.

Mini-skirted girls and long-haired boys account for most of the argument. In one area, a skirt more than two inches above the knee gets its wearer sent home, but most principals

do not object until hemlines go considerably higher. Some boys want to wear bermuda shorts and sandals. Some schools forbid boots. One principal expressed a general attitude toward boys' hair when he said that anything goes as long as the eyes, ears, and back of the neck are visible.

Who is complaining? Almost everyone. Individual students are the source of the majority of protests about appearance, but all other sources have been heard from -- parents, often as individuals and occasionally through their organizations; teachers; the student council; community groups; black groups; and, where it is active, SDS. Protestors go to the principal first, as they do with every topic in the survey. Then the faculty, the student council, and even the Board of Education hear from them. Verbal complaints are most common, but the pupils use every means available from meetings and petitions to failure to obey the rules, or simply what some principals call "misbehavior."

While dress and hair account for more protests than any other single topic, the principals enumerate many other regulations which students oppose. In fact, 82% of the schools have protests against school regulations. In the suburban small junior high schools, all but one school (with protests) have such complaints.

Smoking rules and the cafeteria are the favorite targets of protest after the dress codes. Many schools report cafeteria boycotts. Issues brought up nearly as often are: assembly programs or choice of club speakers; censorship and regulation of school papers, underground papers, or pamphlets; scheduling of sporting events; and social events at the school. The suspension of pupils and "general rules of conduct" draw protests occasionally.

Other topics mentioned only a few times are: the need for new student organizations; the condition of the school's physical plant; inactivity of the student council; ROTC; rising costs; a student group's demand for more voice in rule-making; motor vehicles; open vs closed campus; loss of senior privileges; cheerleader elections; lockers. Saluting the flag and standing for the national anthem were protested by one black group.

It is interesting to note that the use of marijuana and other drugs is protested in only one-half of one percent of the schools.

Race Relations and Other Social or Political Issues

Only one-fourth of the schools have experienced activism in the area of race relations or other current issues such as the peace movement or the draft. Protests about these issues occur mainly in large and medium-size senior high schools in suburban or big-city locations. Rural schools have few such protests.

Difficulties in the area of race relations -- between blacks and whites, or involving other minorities -- are cited by 10% of the schools. Racial protests occur more often in urban schools, but they happen in communities of every size.

Racial problems usually concern antagonism among students. The principal of a small, rural junior high school in the South describes the problem this way:

> *Parents of both the white and black are our major concern. Both groups send their children to school with directions to 'take nothing from the other.' The children therefore get caught in the middle -- they are praised by their parents and punished by the school for the same acts. . .every decision of the teacher and administration is questioned, regardless of how minor (this is not bad actually). There is created, however, an area of doubt, suspicion and fear. . . .*

Racial tension may affect the behavior of both teachers and students. Black groups, or individual parents, or pupils complain that Negro students are not receiving fair treatment in specific instances. For example, there was criticism at one school because all the cheerleaders were white, although the school had many black pupils. This school responded by enlarging the cheerleading squad and adding several black pupils. Criticism on race relations comes from white students or parents, too. One junior high school principal reported that both CORE and the Ku Klux Klan are actively influencing the school's pupils.

In many schools black students are asking for the inclusion of Negro history in the curriculum and for more black teachers and administrators. These suggestions come from every possible source, students and parents, from Negro organizations, from teachers, student councils and community groups.

Discrimination is protested verbally, in publications or through other media, and in conferences. Dramatic confrontations -- boycotts, strikes, marches, sit-ins, and walkouts -- are rare. One walkout was sparked by a school's failing to close when Dr. Martin Luther King was shot.

A few principals reveal their own biases about racial tensions. For example:

> *About one-third of our student population is black. Most of these blacks are fine, upright and capable citizens who get along well with all people. However, about 10% of the blacks come from homes or shacks where people ought not to live. . .they are against any and all things of value. . .I feel that the standards of any school should not be lowered in order to make a place for the small minority group which can't or won't fit into the program. There must be some other kind of a school to which these people can go.*

A larger number of principals think their schools are doing constructive work in this area:

> *We hired a well-qualified Negro to be our consultant and add to the advice our black teachers give us. We have used some of the State Education Department films on Racial Relations and Education with the staff; we have revised courses of study to include more of the contributions of the Negro and Negro history; we have expanded our library holdings in the area of Negro History and contributions; we have made a real effort to hire qualified Negro teachers (without too much success); we have supported the organization of an Afro-American Club. . . .*
>
> *(We have) only 31 blacks of 1540 students but they are organized with outside support and many of their complaints are very legitimate. (We) formed Afro-American Club for blacks and whites -- school-sponsored -- students learn about black problems and Afro-American History -- put on assemblies.*
>
> *We have a neighborhood counselor. Spends all of his time in the community. Visits parents, businesses, any and everybody -- relates well -- organizes parents' meetings. . .Relations have improved.*
>
> *Black students threatened a boycott over the inclusion of the black man in America in American History; they were aided by student teachers who were members of the Black Panther group. (In response we did the following:) 1. Called a meeting of the black students involved. 2. Let them 'blow off steam.' 3. Had them appoint a small group to meet with me. 4. Met with group and resolved issues. 5. Met with entire group again to report all outcomes of discussion, and the time schedule for implementing those suggestions.*

One principal of an urban junior high school with a rapid turnover in faculty, where charges of racism are directed at the staff by both black and white students, makes this point:

> *Colleges are not training teachers for the urban school. We are only 2 miles from (here he mentioned three important colleges) yet we have never been observed by anyone from those institutions nor have they sought from us recommendations based on our experience.*

Vietnam and the draft are the next greatest source of protest, yet they are not listed often. Three percent of schools have some activity regarding Vietnam; only 2% mention the draft. These topics arouse only senior high school pupils. However, activism occurs in rural areas as much as in cities and suburbs. An individual student is usually the source of protest, although parents, community groups, black organizations and SDS also speak up, according to the reports.

Other topics occur occasionally. These include: the vote for 18-year-olds; centralized versus local school boards; welfare programs; the need for political activity clubs in schools; a demand for more student rights with regard to all current issues; opportunities for work experience; the police; the church; the peace movement; and criticism of "authority in general." All such issues are protested almost entirely in discussion or writing rather than in demonstrations.

The Instructional Program

Forty-five percent of our respondents report activism regarding the way the school educates its pupils. These protests hit many targets. Most often named are: teachers -- their quality, where assigned; the student's freedom to choose his teachers; curriculum content; class grouping; scheduling; homework; grades; and exams. Also at issue but less frequently are study halls, ROTC, class size, religion (occasionally mentioned in responses from Catholic schools), extracurricular activities, programs for low achievers, sex education, methods of teaching foreign languages, chemistry, and other subjects, a longer school day due to time lost in a teachers' strike, freedom to choose courses, more Negro teachers, and more courses on black history and culture.

The foregoing protests come from every source, but most of all from individual students and parents. Dissatisfaction with the school program is evenly distributed throughout junior and senior high schools, large and small, wherever they are located. One category, the urban senior high school with more than 2,000 pupils, does show a much higher percentage -- more than 80% of such schools hear protests about the instructional program.

Faculty Affairs

Teachers in 35% of the schools, evenly distributed through large and small communities, are protesting actively their working lives. Mostly they protest salaries and related benefits. In 12% of schools, teachers are asking for better pay. Suburban teachers apparently are more satisfied with their earnings: only 10% of suburban schools have such complaints. In one out of four rural, small, junior high schools, teachers are demanding higher salaries.

Teachers also object to heavy loads, class sizes, number of preparations, staff utilization, a need for due process, extra assignments, a shortage of clerical help, lack of classroom space and equipment, and their lack of choice in curriculum and materials. They are active about academic freedom, tenure, and methods of hiring and promotion. Acting both as individuals and through their organizations, they address themselves mainly to the principal and the board of education through meetings and organized negotiations.

The Need for Better Communication

Respondents from every type of community and kind of school felt that there was a growing need for pupils, administrators, parents, and teachers to know each other better and to open new channels of communication. Many principals return to this theme when asked how they have coped with activism. They believe that getting to know each other is the heart of the matter.

Many of those who answered the survey shared with us their own experiences and their philosophies. Here are some representative statements:

> *School administrators need to give consideration to the paradox in the lives of today's students. Most administrators cling to the tradition that a school must open its doors to the students at 8:00 in the morning, and hold them in captivity for the remainder of the day. Since the home and community have more or less emancipated the youth, is it any wonder that they rebel at the thought of being completely regimented for six hours a day?. . .we require our students to attend classes only and what they do during the rest of the time is their business. . .bells are for animals!. . .what I'm trying to say is that our students have little to rebel against.*
>
> *Teachers are a major concern. It is rough to counteract a young, militant teacher who sometimes 'uses' students. We have found no cure except firing the teacher and this seems to only multiply the problem.*
>
> *Students are currently charged with directing the re-writing and up-dating of the student rulebook.*
>
> *I feel that the press could be of greater help if they would approach activities of high school students in a more affirmative manner.*
>
> *We have used a Student-Faculty Advisory Council (new this year). Their opinions are considered. The principal makes the final decision and informs the SFAC of why. . .This role for teachers and the principal was difficult at the beginning. . .Resentment appears to be reduced and communication improved.*
>
> *Establish student court. Open press conferences with pupils. Ad hoc student committees to work with faculty and parents.*
>
> *It is important -- almost crucial -- that one anticipate what may occur. It is important that a principal build good community relations and keep the community leaders informed. The most devastating weapon a principal can employ with dissidents is the force of the community and its leaders poised against unreasonable demands.*
>
> *Some areas must be handled democratically, others dictatorially. When using the democratic process, use it thoroughly. Don't try to make people believe you are democratic if you are going to make the decision.*
>
> *Our school is in an area where there could be considerable stress and trouble -- We don't concern ourselves with regulations about haircuts and dress. . . we try to operate the school on an informal relaxed basis to take the tenseness out of the building. We give second chances and third chances and just about as many as it takes. . .we want our pupils to like school and to feel its programs are relative to the lives they are living.*
>
> *Listen, listen, and listen some more.*

The Survey

We sent questionnaires to a random sample of 1,982, every 15th principal throughout the United States. There were 1,026 responses. The principals serve in junior or senior high schools or combination schools. All different kinds of schools are included -- public and private, large and small, those in major cities or small towns. The survey was not confined to principals who belong to the NASSP.

Fifty-nine percent, 606 of the 1,026, respondents reported some kind of activism or protest. We believe the respondents are typical of the entire sample, not only because of studies done elsewhere of non-respondents to inquiry forms, but also because the responses came from every part of the country and all types of schools. The respondents were not required to identify their schools -- although the vast majority did so voluntarily.

We recognize the limitations of the survey. It reports the principals' opinions about what is happening rather than offering a set of proven facts. However, anyone who examined the replies would have been struck as we were by the care the principals took in composing their answers. The thoughtfulness of the responses is even more impressive in view of the fact that the questionnaire was a complicated document, four pages in length.

The completed questionnaires contain more data than we were able to include in this report. We hope to publish further findings at a future date.

- National Association of Secondary School Principals
Committee on the Larger Secondary School
1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20036